

REVIEW GUIDE FOR THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

In the fall of 1915 Czar Nicholas II took personal command of the Russian army and left the government to his wife Alexandra. A religious woman, she largely fell under the control of the "mad monk" Rasputin a self proclaimed holy man who claimed the power to stop the bleeding of the hemophiliac son of the empress. By the end of 1916, Russia was no longer able to sustain military operations against the Central Powers. The economy was in chaos, and the power of the government had all but evaporated.

In early 1917 strikes and demonstrations erupted in the Russian capital of Petrograd (formerly St. Petersburg). In March 1917, Tsar Nicholas II abdicated. (NOTE: In 1917 Russia still used the Julian Calendar, which by now was 13 days behind the Gregorian Calendar. When using the Julian calendar the disturbances in Petrograd occur in late February and for this reason the revolution is frequently referred to as the February Revolution). The new Provisional Government lead by Prince George Lvov, a nobleman, and Alexander Kerensky, a member of the socialist party, failed to establish its effective control over the country. In an attempt to restore order the Petrograd Soviet (council) passed Army Order Number 1, which deprived officers of their authority and placed power in the elected committees of common soldiers.

In the spring of 1917 Vladimir Lenin leader of the Bolsheviks presented his April Theses, which urged a proletarian socialist revolution. The Bolsheviks called for "Peace, Land and Bread." When General Kornilov attempted to seize power and establish a military dictatorship the Provisional Government and the Bolsheviks killed the threat. In the November Revolution, Vladimir Lenin and the Bolsheviks took power when a unit of the Red Guards seized the majority of the government buildings. The new government was called the Council of People's Commissars and with Lenin serving as chairman, began to create the world's first Communist society. To augment his plans, Lenin introduced War Communism, the concept of total war to the civil conflict. In this mode industries were nationalized and grain supplies were seized. The Cheka (secret police) was reestablished to root out enemies of the party. After the war Lenin introduced the NEP (New Economic Policy) to restore the Russian economy. Under this plan there was some private ownership of property.

Following Lenin's death in 1924, Joseph Stalin gradually established his authority. In the Five Year Plans, which began in 1928, Stalin sought to reorganize the country's economy, eliminating capitalism and promoting the development of heavy industry and the collectivization of agriculture. Stalin's rule was also marked by the Great Purge, the dictator's attempt to eliminate any possible opposition to his absolute authority.